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ABSTRACT

This flip book presents strategies for managing elementary student behavior while building community in the classroom. The first strategy explains how to remain calm and professional when facing a particularly challenging student by breathing and relaxing and reframing and retaining. The second strategy involves disengaging "smart talk" by using various concise statements or by talking and turning in order to prevent students from continuing to pull the teacher into a power struggle. The third strategy involves being serious but subtle, letting the students know that teachers are aware of their behavior, that they disapprove of their actions, and that they take the situation seriously. The response must be subtle in order to preserve teacher professionalism and student dignity. This can involve using the "teacher look," moving close to the student, and ignoring the behavior. The fourth strategy involves assertive communication (acknowledging the situation, stating the limit, and presenting choices). It recommends using "I" messages and creating a better behavior plan. The fifth strategy involves building community and maintaining relationships. This can involve establishing positive contact, convening an appreciation circle, allowing student choice, making good news calls to parents, expressing success, and modeling mutual respect. (SM)

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Improve Student Behavior

Betty Hollas/ Crystal Springs Books

K-6 Fast Flip Facts

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Improve Student Behavior

by Betty Hollas

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Build Community, Maintain Relationships

Make "Good News" Calls: Call students' parents with good news about their children. Better yet, have students call their parents periodically with their good news.

Express Success: When students repeatedly fail, they often become defensive and frustrated. Make sure students experience success on a daily basis by encouraging them, congratulating them for improvement in their behavior or school work, and providing them with positive feedback on even the smallest task.

Model Mutual Respect: All students, like adults, want to be respected. When we don't respect students, they often revert to destructive or disruptive behavior. We, the teachers, are their classroom role models, and as such, it is our responsibility to be professional, which includes being fair and consistent.

Listen and Watch: Look for the good in everything your students do and say.

Know Your Students: Find out what your students are interested in, what their likes and dislikes are, and how they learn best. Consider these details when making lesson plans and brainstorming various activities.

This "better behavior" flip book is full of time-tested, commonsense strategies for managing student behavior while building community in your classroom.

Build Community, Maintain Relationships

Building a community within your class is the key to establishing a positive learning environment. Undertaking such a task with some students, however, can be a challenge. But if you show a genuine interest in everyone and believe you can make a difference in each student's life, you will have taken the first and most important steps to building and maintaining relationships with your class. And if students are secure in their relationship with you and others, they are less likely to misbehave.

Establish Positive Contact: Acknowledge students by name as they arrive and depart each day.

Call Around the Room: To ensure participation from every student, write each student's name on a Popsicle stick and place the sticks in a can. Periodically, pull out a name-stick when you require a response.

Create Class Rules with Your Students: Give students ownership of their classroom by brainstorming various classroom rules and expectations together. You will find they will be more willing to support what they help create.

Breathe and Relax (B.A.R.): Take a deep breath and think before you respond hastily to a student who is "talking back" to you. This four-to-five second break allows you to refocus and choose your words carefully. It is better to take this time than to do or say something you might later regret.

Reframe and Retain: It is difficult not to react defensively to a student's negative or disrespectful comment or behavior, but before "counter attacking" ("What's this student's problem!") take a second to think about *why* this particular student is acting the way s/he is. ("This student really needs my help right now.") In other words, "reframe" the situation and retain your self-composure while calmly considering the student's needs.

Assertive Communication

Communication exists on a continuum from aggressive, which tends to antagonize and blame, to passive, which tends to ignore and reinforce inappropriate behavior. Assertive communication, however, strikes a happy medium between the two by allowing you to define limits, be fair and consistent, reinforce expectations, and provide students with acceptable choices.

BE ASSERTIVE WITH A.S.A.P.

Below is an example of the three forms of communication in action:

Situation: *Student is throwing sand at recess.*

Aggressive Response: "Quit throwing sand! How many times do I have to tell you."

Passive Response: You pretend you don't see it and do nothing.

Assertive Response with A.S.A.P.

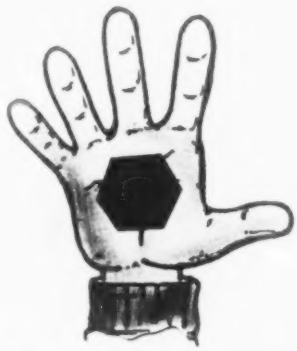
A = Acknowledge the situation: "I know it's fun to throw sand."

S = State the limit: "But we don't throw sand because it can hurt people, especially if it gets into their eyes."

A = And

P = Present choices: "You may either use our toys and equipment in the right way or sit down and think about how we use these and other items until you're ready to rejoin the group. You decide."

Talk and Turn: This strategy helps prevent students from continuing to try to pull you into a power struggle.



1. Stand at an angle to the student.
2. Do not use the word, "Stop," but put your hand out like a stop sign, instead.
3. Speak slowly and softly.
4. Use two or three words and tell the student the behavior that is inappropriate. For example, "That's arguing."
5. Tell the student the behavior you would like to see him/her demonstrate. For example, "Show me control."
6. Turn and walk away from the student.

Serious but Subtle

When children make unacceptable behavior choices, our goal as educators is to acknowledge the situation without engaging them in open argument or backing them into a corner. Let students know that you are aware of their behavior, that you disapprove of their actions, and that you take the situation seriously, but be subtle in your response and preserve both your professionalism and your students' dignity.

- **Use the "Teacher Look":** We all know the famous "teacher look"! With one brief glance you can quickly and effectively help refocus students on the task at hand.
- **Move Close to the Student and Use a Gentle Touch:** Sometimes a gentle touch to a student's shoulder or arm can quietly remind him/her to rethink what s/he is about to do or say.
- **Ask the Student for His/Her Help by Being Patient:** Most children want to be helpful. If one of your students is demanding your attention, and it is clearly not an emergency, show him/her you are concerned but need him/her to talk with you at a more appropriate time. For example, you might say, "I can tell you are really upset. I want to listen to what is bothering you, but I need you to help me now by waiting until recess to talk."
- **Alter the Learning State:** We all need change from time to time. Sometimes the most effective way to prevent misbehavior or diffuse potentially volatile situations, therefore, is to enact some sort of change. Try moving around the room when interacting with or instructing your class, taking stretch breaks after periods of seat time, sending a student on an errand, or giving a student choice in his/her next activity.
- **Ignore the Behavior:** Some students misbehave, fall off task, or engage in "smart-talk" because they feel it is the only method by which they can gain attention. But can you imagine what would happen if teachers addressed every single individual comment or action? Sometimes the best way to handle non-emergency situations is to ignore them and allow students to settle matters on their own. For example, if a student is daydreaming, give him/her a minute or two to get back on task before you say anything.

Disengaging "Smart-Talk"

Say a Lot in a Little: Sometimes the less you say the more powerful the message you send to students. Help disengage "smart-talk" (talking back) by using the lines below.

"That's a very interesting opinion. You might be correct."

"I want to find a solution. Let's meet later."

"When you are talking to anyone, including me, please be polite and respectful."

"I'm not interested in 'problem-admiring'—i.e., just discussing problems without seeking solutions—or 'problem-blaming' —placing blame on others. I'm interested in finding a solution."

"I" Messages: When a student is off-task or misbehaving, an "I" message is another assertive communication strategy that shows the student you acknowledge the situation and want to discuss with him/her why his/her actions are inappropriate. Unlike a "you" message, which tends to be aggressive in nature, an "I" message does not use put-downs, blame, or intimidation.

For example:
"When you throw sand at people, I become upset because you could hurt them."

Formula for an "I" message:
When you _____
I feel (or some other verb) _____
because _____.

Create a "Better-Behavior" Plan: If an older student misbehaves, ask him/her to write and respond to the following questions:

"What behavior did I choose?"
"What else could I have done?"
"Here's what I will do next time."

Younger students can draw what they need to *stop* doing and *start* doing.

Be sure to talk with all students about their plan, and convey that you know they can successfully follow these self-made guidelines.

Breathe, Focus, and Reframe

Brain research suggests that under real or imagined threat, the brain's capacity to process information and respond rationally is compromised. If a student constantly misbehaves and/or attempts to engage us in an argument, *our* capacity to remain professional is also compromised.

Below are two strategies to assist you in remaining calm and professional when facing a particularly challenging student.

- **Convene an "Appreciation Circle"**: Give students opportunities to congratulate and affirm good behavior and work.
- **Make Lunch Plans**: Make plans to eat lunch with your students in the classroom or at an alternative location at least once a month. (If it's nice, take them outside!) Students will enjoy getting to know you without your "teacher hat" on.
- **Allow Student Choice**: Give students various choices about content, behavior consequences, and activities.

Content:	"Which math game would you like to play today?"
Behavior:	"We would love you to rejoin the rest of the class, but if you need to stay at your desk a little longer and think about your behavior, please do."
Activities:	"Would you rather read by yourself or with a friend today?"

Introduction

Chances are if you have worked with your class to build a caring, responsible community, you have given your students life-skills that will empower them to modify their own behavior. It is also helpful, however, to have on hand a variety of strategies for those times when, no matter how strong the community, students misbehave. And because teachers are the chief role models in the classroom, it is imperative we make sure our actions and language are appropriate and our responses to various situations, including student misbehavior, are fair and consistent. And while we should never blame, attack, or shame, we should hold students accountable for their misconduct.

Recommended Resources

Bluestein, Jane. *21st Century Discipline*. Torrance, Calif.: Fearon Teacher Aids, 1999.

Fay, Jim, and David Funk. *Teaching with Love and Logic*. Golden, Colo.: Love and Magic Press, 1995.

Kottler, Jeffrey. *Success with Challenging Students*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1997.

Mendler, Allen. *Power Struggles*. Rochester, N.Y.: Discipline Associates, 1997.

Nelson, Jane. *Positive Discipline in the Classroom*. Rocklin, Calif.: Prima Publishing, 1993.

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Is there a student in your room who constantly interrupts? How about one who misbehaves on a daily basis? Are you looking for just the right tip on how to address these potentially volatile situations? Look no further!

Improve Student Behavior provides quick and successful, time-tested strategies on how to modify student behavior while maintaining teacher sanity, preserving student dignity, and building community.

Betty Hollas is a veteran educator with more than 24 years of exemplary teaching experience. Betty's energy, humor, and keen insights have made her a very popular presenter at state and national conferences. She is a former Teacher of the Year and has been enthusiastically sharing her strategies with fellow educators since 1982.

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